

MILDURA ARTS CENTRE

199 Curston Avenue, Mildura, 3500

(050) 23 3733

OPEN : MONDAY - FRIDAY 9:00 - 4:30 PM
SUNDAY 2:00 - 4:30 pm

CLOSED : GOOD FRIDAY, ANZAC DAY AND
CHRISTMAS DAY

on
less

ADULTS : \$2.00

PENSIONERS :

STUDENTS AND CHILDREN

\$1.00

FREE

1891



Rio Vista

BRIEF HISTORY

The brothers George and William Benjamin Chaffey were born at Brockville, Canada on January 28th 1848, and October 21st 1856 respectively. In 1871 they moved to Riverside, California after which they launched the Etiwanda and Ontario colonising schemes, becoming famous irrigation engineers. George Chaffey had the mechanical mind and the vision; "W.B." was the business man, horticultural and soil expert.

In 1885 Alfred Deakin, Chairman of the Royal Commission on irrigation, met the Chaffey Brothers. Deakin was aware of the great irrigation potential that the Australian Murray River had, and impressed this upon them. On coming to Australia, the brothers saw how right Deakin was. They sold up their American interests and moved to live in Mildura.

In 1887, after many legal battles, they were eventually in possession of 25,000 acres of land for the establishment of their dream. They were very successful, and by the end of 1890, Mildura had 3,000 people.

In 1889 the building of Rio Vista (River View) commenced. William Chaffey was building it for himself and his first wife Hattie. However, Hattie died before it was finished. In 1891 "Rio Vista" was ready to be occupied. W. B. Chaffey married again and lived in the "Rio Vista" with his new wife who happened to be a niece of his first wife. Her name was Hattie Sexton Schell. In 1926, "W.B." died at the age of 70. His second wife lived at 'Rio Vista' until late in her life, but left prior to her death in 1950.

In 1947, Mildura City Council bought "Rio Vista" for £18,000 to house the R.D. Elliott collection, and to open it as an Art Gallery and Museum. It was officially open to the public on May 25th 1956.

Today this magnificent three storey homestead features antiques, furniture and effects of the 1890's. Exquisite hand painted windows imported from England add the finishing touch to Mildura's more beautiful home.

ABOUT THE HOUSE

The Architects were Messrs. Sharland and Edmonds. The brick work was in charge of Mr. E. N. Wells, and the carpentry was chiefly in the hands of Chapman and Sherring. W. Kells of Ontario, California, did a lot of the fine cabinet work. Its red bricks came from local kilns, the Murray Pine and Red Gum from Risbey's Swamills.

BASEMENT

Originally there was a storage room, wine cellar and ballroom. The floors in this area are Murray Pine. The ballroom floor originally had springs underneath it for dancing. Today, the springs no longer work. Over the years, the floorboards have become more curved.

GROUND FLOOR

All floors here are made of Western Australian Jarrah except for the hallway.

HALLWAY

The beautiful floor in the main entrance hall is inlaid with Italian tiles and the wood panels are of local and other wood. The original wallpaper, after 100 years, is still in good condition. This embossed paper is of English make. Only the best material was used and the skilled labour employed can be seen by the cedar doors and the original door knobs, locks and brass hinges.

SMOKING ROOM

The walls and ceilings are made of locally grown Murray Pine and floors of Western Australian Karri. Each piece of wood was separately grooved and then fitted together. The fire-place is made of Italian black marble.

DINING ROOM

This room is almost original. The mantelpiece is made from different kinds of Italian marble and the beautiful ceiling consists of local Murray Pine.

KITCHEN

Across the service doorway from the Dining Room was found a large kitchen, scullery and pantry. The two servants quarters were above and consisted of two bedrooms and a bathroom.

DRAWING ROOM/ BREAKFAST ROOM

The archway across the centre of this room was used as a room divider. Heavy curtains were drawn across it to make two smaller rooms and were pulled back when entertaining.

THE MAIN STAIRCASE

This is made of Cedar and Blackwood.

STAINED GLASS WINDOW

These are hand made and imported from England.

SERVANT'S STAIRCASE

This is made of Blackwood.

UPSTAIRS

The floor consists of 5 bedrooms and a bathroom. The floors are made of Western Australian Karri in the bedrooms. The bathroom had a white marble bath and the mosaic floor is made up of separate pieces. The pattern is laid in in squares.

THE GARDENER'S COTTAGE

A small two storey building at the rear of Rio Vista which is not open to the public, is designed in typical Americal Style.

A fountain was situated in front of Rio Vista as a centre piece to the driveway. It was later removed and placed in Deakin Avenue, opposite the Post Office. A replica fountain now stands in front of Rio Vista.

A conservatory was attached to the side where the Arts Centre now stands.

EARLY SETTLEMENT OF MILDURA

The brothers George and William Benjamin Chaffey were born at Brockville, Ontario, Canada on January 28th 1848 and October 21st 1856 respectively. In 1871 they moved to Riverside, California after which they launched the Etiwanda and Ontario colonizing schemes, becoming famous irrigation engineers. George Chaffey had the mechanical mind and the vision; "W.B." was the business man, horticultural and soil expert.

The model irrigation colony of Ontario became famous for its main thoroughfare, Euclid Avenue, on which Deakin Avenue, Mildura was modelled. Alfred Deakin, gifted young Cabinet Minister and Chairman of the Royal Commission on Irrigation, met George Chaffey in Los Angeles in 1885. The party visited Ontario where "W.B." showed them all that had been achieved. The model colony and the Chaffey brothers made a deep impression on Deakin who, in turn impressed them with his enthusiasm for the Murray River and its potential in Australia.

In 1886 George left Los Angeles for Australia, leaving "W.B." in charge of Ontario.

His arrival was greeted with enthusiasm by the local press and he was feted by Deakin and prominent businessmen.

After a short journey down the Murray from Echuca to Swan Hill, George returned to Melbourne enthusiastic about the potential of the Murray Valley. He then set off for Adelaide, and returned via the Murray to the Mildura Station which he heard was for sale.

George Chaffey became convinced of the possibilities of Mildura as a result of this three day inspection of vines, and various fruit trees in the garden of the Mildura Station.

Once he bought the Mildura Homestead, George Chaffey cabled his brother to sell up their American interests and come to Australia.

On his return from Mildura he negotiated with Alfred Deakin for a satisfactory agreement which would enable him to establish an irrigation colony at Mildura.

An agreement was signed at Mildura on 21st October, 1886 that, "the Government would set aside 250,000 acres at Mildura for occupation under license for twenty years by the Chaffey brothers for irrigation purposes: Chaffey brothers have the right to construct works on any part of this area for conserving and distributing water". Over the 20 years the Chaffey's were to spend 300,000 pounds on permanent improvements.

EARLY SETTLEMENT OF MILDURA

Charges that the Government was giving away the people's heritage to "two cute Yankee land grabbers" were made and eventually the Opposition secured an amendment to the Bill requiring that the concession be thrown open to public tender.

Mildura tender elapsed without an offer and the Victorian Government approached George Chaffey who still had his heart set on Mildura. An indenture was drawn up and signed on 31st May 1887, by Sir Henry Brougham Loch, K.C.B. Governor of Victoria and George and W.B. Chaffey, under terms of which the brothers took possession in the following August of 250,000 acres of land at Mildura for the establishment of an irrigation colony.

Settlers began to arrive in 1888. By the end of 1890, Mildura had 3,000 people. Vines, citrus and stone fruits had been planted in 6,500 acres. The surveying of Mildura, the clearing, ploughing and grading of the land with the aid of steam driven traction engines, and the excavation of main channels proceeded rapidly while settlers arrived.

The paddlesteamer "Jane Eliza" was used as a temporary pumping pontoon at Psyche Bend to pump water from the river into King's Billabong, from which storage could be lifted to high levels and into the main channels.

In January 1889, a second engine similar to the Billabong unit was erected at Psyche Bend, replacing the "Jane Eliza". These triple expansion engines with four centrifugal pumps fitted direct to the driving shaft of each engine without gearing, were manufactured by Tangyes of Birmingham, England to George Chaffey's design. Tangyes refused to accept responsibility and cast the name Chaffey on them. These were the largest irrigation pumping plants in the world, and soon became famous. For close on 70 years they served the district and were ultimately replaced by electrically powered units.

The record harvest in 1893 ended in disaster. The river closed to shipping and there was no adequate method of transporting fruit to market. Channels were undermined by yabbies, salt seepage was killing trees and vines. Discontent over water rates, fanned by striking miners from Broken Hill, festered in the settlement. The failure of Victorian Banks resulted in a depression all over the state. Chaffey's paid wages in promissory notes; a record rain ruined the harvest in 1895, and at the end of the year the Chaffey's closed their offices. In 1896 George Chaffey, bankrupt, returned to California to earn a living; "W.B." stayed to work in his vineyard setting an example to those who remained, and pumping stations were manned by locals. "W.B." tried to sell his home "Rio Vista" for 1,000 pounds but he could not find a buyer for it.

EARLY SETTLEMENT OF MILDURA

In 1896, the Fruit Growers Association was formed in both Mildura and Renmark to fix prices and stabilise markets. The establishment of packing houses in 1900 and the coming of the railway in 1903 marked the turning point for Mildura.

In 1910, wire netting racks replaced more primitive methods of drying.

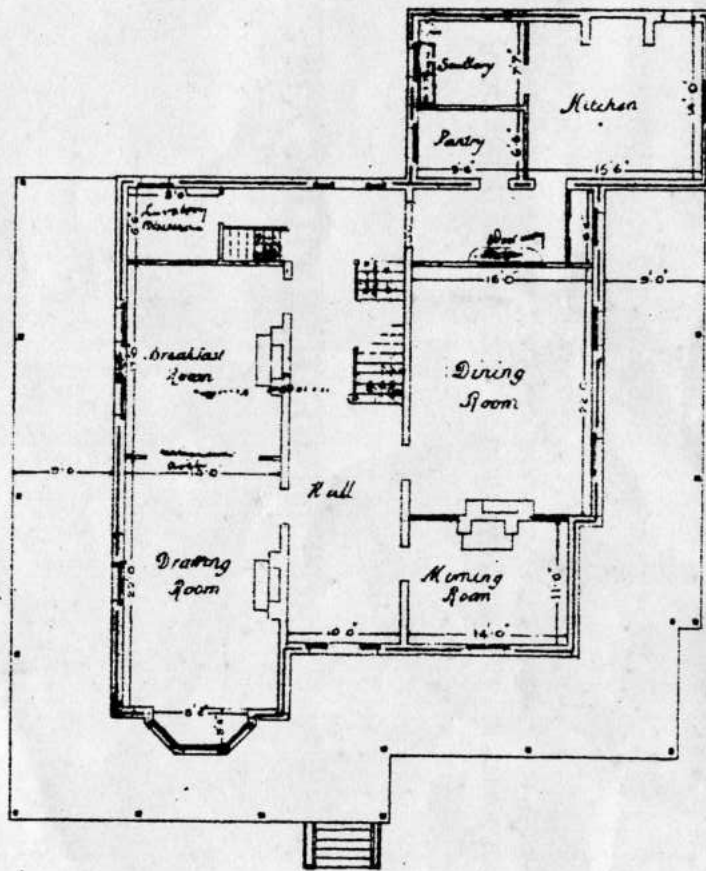
To mark the silver jubilee of the Chaffey's first visit to Mildura, the citizens presented "W.B." with a Ford car and a souvenir album in 1911, as a token of their confidence and respect.

In 1920 he was elected as the Borough of Mildura's first Mayor, and he was made Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1924.

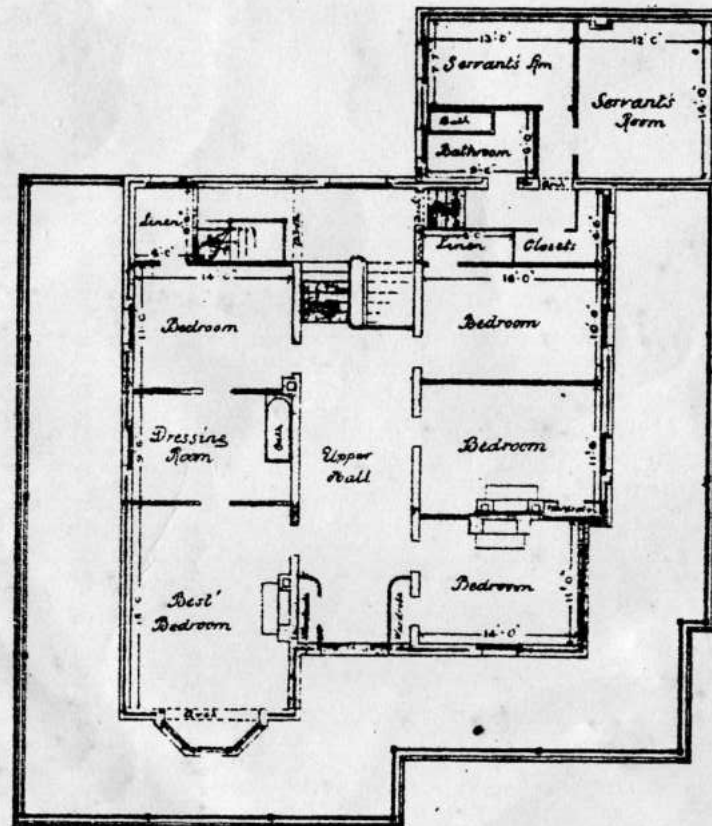
"W.B." never looked back after 1911, remaining in Mildura until his death in 1926 at the age of 70. Mrs. Chaffey lived at "Rio Vista" until late in her life, but left prior to her death in 1950.

Family developments are "Mildura Winery", at Merbein and Irymple, and R.H. Chaffey Travel and Real Estate Agency in Mildura.

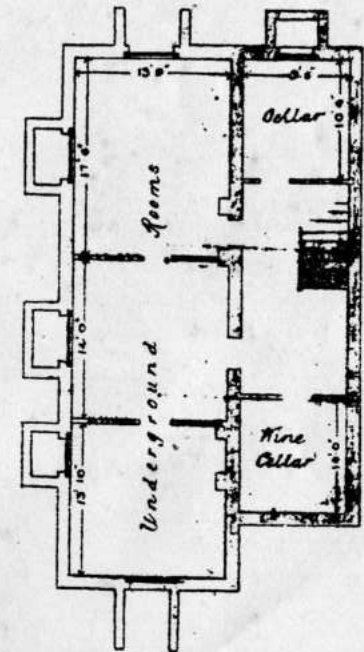
RESIDENCE at MILDURA
for W. B. Chaffey Esq
Scale 8 feet to an inch.



Ground Plan



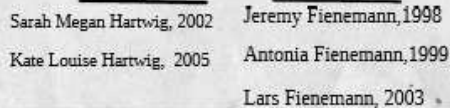
First Floor



Basement

Architects Messrs. Sharland & Edmonds whose plans largely followed ideas supplied by W.B. Chaffey

William Benjamin Chaffley
21-10-1854 — 4-6-1926
(M) Hattie Schell
31-7-1855 — 6-10-1889
Married at Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada
23rd. May 1877



Second Marriage

William Benjamin Chaffey
21-10-1854 – 4-6-1926
(M) Hattie Sexton Schell
6-3-1867 – 4-1950
Married in U.S.A. 1891

